

Message Text

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15
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C O N F I D E N T I A L ROME 18238

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: NATO, OCON, AWACS, MILI
SUBJECT: ITALIAN SUPPORT FOR NATO AEW (AWACS) PROGRAM

REF: (A) STATE 265681 (DTG 281457Z OCT 76), (B) ROME
13246 (DTG 131605Z AUG 76), (C) ROME 17747 (DTG
291530Z OCT 76), (D) STATE 268442 (DTG 011803Z
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1. I RAISED QUESTION OF ITALIAN SUPPORT FOR NATO AEW WITH
FOREIGN MINISTER FORLANI TODAY, DRAWING ON POINTS
DISCUSSED IN REFTELS AND LEAVING WITH HIM AIDE MEMOIRE
AS PER REF. A.

2. FORLANI WAS WELL ACQUAINTED WITH THE AWACS PROGRAM
FROM HIS EARLIER SERVICE AS MINISTER OF DEFENSE AND
ASCERTED HE UNDERSTOOD THE KEY IMPORTANCE OF THE
PROGRAM AND THE SIGNIFICANCE WE ATTACHED TO IT.
PREDICTABLY HE EMPHASIZED THE FINANCIAL IMPEDIMENTS
THAT MADE UNLIKELY (UNDER CURRENT CIRCUMSTANCES
AT LEAST) ITALY'S PARTICIPATION. HE ALSO
REFERRED TO SPECIFIC OBSTACLES THAT WOULD HAVE
TO BE OVERCOME, NOTABLY THE CONVICTION OF THE
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ITALIAN MILITARY LEADERSHIP THAT THE AWACS

PROJECTED DEPLOYMENT WOULD NOT DIRECTLY BENEFIT ITALY AND THAT ITALIAN PARTICIPATION IN IT WOULD ABSORB FUNDS DESTINED FOR PROCUREMENT OF VITAL MODERNIZATION EQUIPMENT (READ MRCA). I INTERJECTED THAT SHOULD THE FFOB BE LOCATED IN ITALY THAT OBJECTION WOULD OBVIOUSLY NOT BE TENABLE. MOREOVER, FROM BRIEFINGS I HAD HAD IT WAS CLEAR AWACS WAS A FLEXIBLE SYSTEM, PERMUTATIONS OF THE DEPLOYMENT OF WHICH CLEARLY PROVIDED COVERAGE FOR ITALY AND THE SOUTHERN FLANK.

3. FORLANI REPEATED HIS UNDERSTANDING OF THE IMPORTANCE OF THE PROGRAM AND INDICATED HE WOULD REFER THE MATTER TO THE PRIME MINISTER. HE SUGGESTED FURTHER THAT THE QUESTION SHOULD BE TAKEN UP BY THE EMBASSY WITH THE MINISTRY OF DEFENSE. (WE WILL IN FACT BE MAKING A SIMILAR DEMARCHE AT THE MOD LATER THIS WEEK, AS WELL AS REINFORCING MY CALL ON THE MINISTER WITH DISCUSSIONS AT THE WORKING LEVEL WITH BOTH MINISTRIES.)

4. FORLANI SURMISED THAT ANY ITALIAN FUNDS FOR AEW WOULD PROBABLY HAVE TO COME FROM A SUPPLEMENTAL APPROPRIATION FOR THAT PURPOSE AND WOULD BE SUBJECT TO PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE -- A PROSPECT HE OBVIOUSLY DID NOT RELISH. VOLPE

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